



The Impact of Servant Leadership on Innovative Work Behavior: The Role of Work Meaningfulness
and Innovative Organizational Culture in Colombia

Trabajo de grado

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Bogotá, Colombia
2026



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2026

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Declaración de integridad académica en el uso de inteligencia artificial (IA)

Propósito	Descripción	Herramienta
Revisión de literatura	Utilizamos IA para la revisión de literatura existente, facilitando una comprensión más profunda de los conceptos y teorías relevantes del trabajo.	Notebook LM
Asistencia analítica	Utilizamos IA como herramienta auxiliar para la traducción de ítems específicos y como asistente de lectura conceptual para optimizar la comprensión de la revisión de literatura.	Chatgpt
Recopilación de literatura	Utilizamos IA como asistente de lectura conceptual para sintetizar literatura e identificar rutas clave de investigación durante el desarrollo del marco teórico.	Gemini

Declaración adicional
Reconozco que la herramienta de IA no reemplaza mi juicio académico y que soy completamente responsable del contenido final del trabajo presentado.
La declaración recalca que, siendo un acto fundamentado en la honestidad, no implica sanciones ni repercusiones académicas. Más bien, al adherirse a los principios de la integridad académica, este acto contribuye significativamente a la creación de un entorno de confianza y transparencia en el uso de la inteligencia artificial con propósitos académicos.

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Glossary

Servant leadership (SL): Is a style of leadership that was first introduced by Robert K Greenleaf (1970) that prioritizes the followers wellbeing and personal achievements over the companies' goals.

Work meaningfulness (WM): It is a subjective psychological state in which an employee perceives their work as purposeful, significant, and aligned with their personal values and life goals (Steger et al., 2012).

Innovative organizational culture (IOC): It is an organizational environment characterized by dynamism, creativity, flexibility, and a shared tolerance for risk-taking (Wallach, 1983).

Innovative work behavior (IWB): Is a multi-stage individual behavioral process that is interested on the intentional generation, promotion, and implementation of novel and useful ideas within a work role or organization to improve performance (Janssen, 2000).

Hierarchical linear regression: Is a multi-stage statistical method used to evaluate how the introduction of successive blocks of independent variables affects the variance and explanatory power (R^2) of a dependent variable.

Beta coefficient (β): Is a standardized statistical measure that indicates the strength and direction of the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable, representing the expected change in the dependent variable per unit of change in the predictor.

R-squared (R^2): Is the coefficient of determination that measures the proportion of variance in the dependent variable, that is predictably explained by the independent variables included in the statistical model.

Cronbach's alpha (α): Is a psychometric metric used to evaluate the internal consistency and reliability of a scale.

Resumen

Objetivo – El objetivo de este estudio es investigar cómo el liderazgo servidor (SL), el significado del trabajo (WM) y la cultura organizacional innovadora (IOC) influyen en el comportamiento innovador en el trabajo (IWB), especialmente en el contexto colombiano y latinoamericano.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Mediante un diseño cuantitativo transversal, se recopilaron datos a través de un cuestionario en línea utilizando una técnica de muestreo por conveniencia no probabilístico de una muestra multisectorial de 200 empleados en Colombia. Se utilizaron medidas de confiabilidad, análisis de correlación y regresiones lineales para evaluar las relaciones estadísticas directas e indirectas entre las variables y probar las trayectorias hipotetizadas.

Resultados – Los resultados sugieren que el SL, el WM y la IOC tienen una influencia positiva en el IWB.

Limitaciones/implicaciones de la investigación – La principal limitación metodológica es el diseño transversal del estudio, ya que todas las variables se midieron en un solo momento, lo que impidió establecer relaciones causales definitivas a largo plazo. Además, dado que la investigación se basa en autoinformes de los 200 participantes, aumenta la posibilidad de varianza del método común y sesgo de deseabilidad social.

Implicaciones prácticas – Para los gerentes en América Latina, el estudio sugiere que para lograr la innovación corporativa es necesario alejarse del control burocrático rígido. En este sentido, las organizaciones deberían diseñar programas de capacitación en liderazgo centrados en comportamientos de liderazgo de servicio (como empatía, humildad y responsabilidad) como estrategia para generar un clima innovador y promover el significado del lugar de trabajo para los empleados.

Originalidad/Valor: Este estudio es original, ya que ningún estudio previo ha investigado múltiples conceptos como SL, WM e IOC en un mismo modelo para analizar su influencia en IWB. En general, se enfoca en un contexto geográfico latinoamericano poco estudiado.

Palabras clave:

Liderazgo servidor, comportamiento innovador en el trabajo, significado del trabajo y cultura organizacional innovadora.

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to investigate how Servant Leadership (SL), Work Meaningfulness (WM), and Innovative Organizational Culture (IOC) influences Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) especially in the Colombian and Latin American context.

Design/methodology/approach – Adopting a quantitative, cross-sectional design, data were collected via an online questionnaire using a non-probability convenience sampling technique from a multi-sectoral sample of 200 employees in Colombia. Reliability measures, correlation analysis, and linear regressions were utilized to evaluate the direct and indirect statistical relationships among the variables and test the hypothesized paths.

Findings – The findings suggest that SL, WM, and IOC have a positive influence on IWB.

Research limitations/implications –The primary methodological limitation is the study's cross-sectional design, as all variables were measured at a single point in time, it prevented establishing definitive long-term causal relationships. Additionally, as the investigation relies on self-report measures from the 200 participants, this increases the potential for common method variance and social desirability bias.

Practical implications – For managers in Latin America, the study suggests that to have corporate innovation it is required to move away from rigid, bureaucratic control. In this sense, organizations should design leadership training programs that are centered around servant leadership behaviors (such as empathy, humility, and stewardship) as a strategy to harvest an innovative climate and promote employee workplace meaning.

Originality/value –This study is original, in that no previous studies have investigated multiple concepts such as SL, WM and IOC in the same model to analyze the influence in IWB. Overall, it focuses on a little-studied Latin American geographical context.

Keywords

Servant leadership, Innovative Work Behavior, Innovative Organizational Culture, Work Meaningfulness.

1. Introduction

In recent years, organizations have looked for leadership approaches that allow them to grow and improve their company. In increasingly competitive and dynamic environments, innovation has become fundamental to the long-term survival and sustainability of organizations. They no longer depend exclusively on traditional vertical control systems, but rather on the knowledge, creativity, initiative, and capacity of employees to contribute strategically to organizational development (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 2002). Despite the existence of more than 20 different styles of leadership (and plenty more), the biggest interest they have is in finding one that specifically promotes meaning, purpose and wellbeing, because they have discovered that if they want their company to thrive, their employees must thrive as well. That is why servant leadership obtained a lot of attention and recognition, since it emphasizes aspects like service, humility and personal development; and these are precisely the human-centered characteristics that make this particular leadership style stand out from others.

At the same time, variables such as innovative behavior, work meaningfulness, and innovative organizational culture have become fundamental aspects within management and organizational behavior because it has an impact on employee experience, and overall company performance. Nowadays, servant leadership has become relevant since its focus on employee well-being and growth can directly influence how they perceive their work, interact with the organizational culture, and develop innovative initiatives. In some ways, this

leadership style can promote higher levels of job autonomy as a result of the trust, support, and empowerment it gives.

From a theoretical perspective, it is stated a causal relationship in which servant leadership directly influences how employees perceive the purpose of their work, the culture in which they are, and their willingness to generate and implement new ideas.

Although there is a conceptual relation between the attributes of servant leadership and these variables, empirical research on this topic is still limited. While studies related to leadership and innovation or to organizational culture have been found separately, there is a significant gap in research that jointly examines the influence of SL, IOC, and WM on innovative work behavior. This limitation is even more significant in Latin American organizational contexts, where organizational structures, relational dynamics, and work environments can have a significant difference from those studied in North America, Europe, and Asia. This gap shows the opportunity to investigate how these concepts relate and are seen in real organizational environments, and also offers the opportunity to contribute new empirical evidence.

In this sense, understanding the influence of these variables on IWB is relevant because it explains how leadership focused on people can translate into both individual and organizational benefits. At a personal level, it strengthens employee motivation, a sense of belonging, commitment, and professional growth. At a business level, it can boost productivity, creativity, adaptability, and competitive sustainability in increasingly dynamic environments.

This research contributes to the field in three main ways. First, it clarifies how servant leadership simultaneously influences variables fundamental to organizational performance. Second, it provides new evidence on the influence of servant leadership, innovative organizational culture, and work meaningfulness on innovative work behaviour within a

single conceptual model. Third, it expands the study of servant leadership in the Latin American context, where a significant gap exists in the current literature. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of how human-centered leadership can strengthen innovation, work meaningfulness and an organizational culture that leads to employee growth and company sustainability.

2. Literature review

2.1 Servant leadership

Over the last few decades, many authors have become interested in a different way of leading called servant leadership. This style is special because it focuses on the human side of work. The person who started this concept was Robert K. Greenleaf. He explained his philosophy like this: “The Servant-Leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1977). So what this means is that someone does not become a leader because they want power, but because they genuinely want to help others first. For the author, the purpose of a leader is to support their growth and development to become “healthier, wiser, freer, and more autonomous” (Greenleaf, 2008). He explained that you can tell someone is a good leader if they make a positive impact on the people around, causing them to grow, improve, and become more independent over time.

The concept of servant leadership was further developed by other scholars to expand the theory. For example, the early 1990s Spears' (1998) made an analysis of Greenleaf's works on servant leadership with a focus on ten traits of a good servant leader, including listening and empathy. It should be mentioned that it was quite a useful move on the part of the researcher as it allowed turning servant leadership from a theoretical construct into a practical one.

During the early 2000s, researchers worked on defining servant leadership more clearly and showing how different it is from other styles of leadership. For example, Russell and Stone (2002) described servant leadership as made of basic values like “vision, honesty, service, and empowerment.” Around the same time, Stone, Russell, and Patterson (2004) explained the main difference between this and other styles: “The transformational leader’s focus is directed toward the organization and building follower commitment toward organizational objectives, while the servant leader’s focus is on the followers, and the achievement of organizational objectives is a subordinate outcome.” From this perspective, organizational success is still important, but it is seen because of supporting and helping employees grow. The idea is that when people feel valued, empowered, and genuinely supported, they are more likely to contribute positively to the organization and help achieve its objectives.

As the field of servant leadership research kept growing, researchers started concentrating on the process of measuring this concept as well as studying the consequences of its implementation within organizations. In this regard, one may mention the research conducted by Liden et al. (2008) that brought about the development of the SL-28 scale. Being used to measure such traits of servant leadership as emotional healing, this research confirmed the positive outcomes of such leader behaviors as increased organizational trust and performance. In addition, Liden et al. (2015) presented a shorter version of the scale, called the SL-7. The results of research based on the use of the latter scale demonstrate a strong connection between the discussed phenomenon, employee engagement and creativity. In other words, people working under servant leaders tend to be more motivated.

Several researchers, including Dirk van Dierendonck, have elaborated the reasons for its success. According to his opinion, “Leaders who combine their motivation to lead with a need to serve, display servant leadership” (Van Dierendonck, 2011). These people are

characterized by humility, and they work for the benefit of the team. As a result, these leaders take care of everyone on the team and not of themselves only. There are other opinions, according to which it implies “a multidimensional leadership approach that is concerned with ethical behavior, emphasizing the needs of followers and their development” (Coetzer, Bussin and Geldenhuys, 2017). In fact, these ideas support the concept of servant leadership and suggest that the main task of the leader is to guide others.

Finally, the work by Canavesi and Minelli (2022) shows that this leadership style helps people find a reason to enjoy their work. By building strong relationships, leaders help employees feel that their job has a real purpose. All these years of study show us that servant leadership is a powerful way of leading that helps individuals stay healthy and happy, which later leads to success for the entire organization.

2.2 Innovative organizational culture

Innovative organizational culture, understood as IOC has become more important in every company around the world. Edgar Schein (1990) considered as the father of this concept defines it in his article as a “pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learns as it solves problems of external adaptation and internal integration”. According to him and his research this culture manifests at three levels: artifacts (visible structures and processes), values (goals, ideals, and ideologies), and underlying basic assumptions, which are unconscious beliefs taken for granted that determine people’s behavior and feelings.

A complementary point of view comes from Denison and Mishra (1995) who argue that a culture’s adaptability is a fundamental predictor of an organization’s success. Through their paper they explain that in the enterprises that foster a culture of change in which every employee is motivated to experiment and learn is easier to innovate. This is very important because it gives the first hints about the close relationship that exists between innovation and

organizational culture, which finally shapes the psychological environment where individuals find the support and safety to engage in innovative efforts.

On the other hand, innovation has been a subject of study for a long time as well. Its appearance comes specially from Joseph Schumpeter who was seen as a visionary and rebel of classic theory of economics. According to the article of Omar Montoya Suárez (2004) Schumpeter mentions radical innovation as the most important one as there are “those capable of causing 'revolutionary' changes, decisive transformations in society and the economy.” These include actions such as introducing new consumer goods into the market, developing new methods of production, opening a new market, generating a new source of supply for raw materials or even changing the organization of any entity or its managing processes.

Regarding the previous definition, it is important to mention that while Schumpeter understood innovation as a market-disrupting force, this element can also be thought of as an incremental process that happens through continuous and subtle improvements made by people. According to De Jong and Den Hartog (2007), this is known as Innovative Work Behavior (IWB), which they understand as acting towards the initiation and application (within a work role, group or organization) of new and useful ideas, processes, products or procedures.

Now that these two definitions have been studied apart, it is adequate to understand them together. According to Ekmekcioglu and Öner (2023) servant leadership, innovative work behavior and innovative culture are highly related. They define this last one as “the extent to which the business’s norms and values foster innovation”. According to their study, IOC encourages new ideas, risk taking and innovation. In this sense, people who make part of the organization feel inspired to grow and innovate inside the company which can lead to

positive organizational and individual outcomes (Wei et al., 2013). And that is why this paper is interested in going deeper in this variable.

2.3 Work meaningfulness

Steger et al. (2012) define work meaningfulness as a subjective, eudaimonic experience where individuals perceive their work to be significant and positive in valence. Following Martela and Pessi (2018), scholars emphasize a distinction between 'meaning,' which describes the descriptive output of sensemaking, and 'meaningfulness,' which refers to the evaluative amount of significance attached to an activity. Contemporary frameworks explained in the same article, often categorize this experience of work significance through two sub dimensions: broader purpose, and self-realization (Martela & Pessi, 2018). These elements are measured via multidimensional models that assess positive meaning, meaning making, and the degree to which work serves the greater good (Steger et al., 2012).

Theoretical progress in this field also involves a dual conceptualization between realization, which addresses alienation, and justification, which addresses anomie (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). In the document, the realization perspective suggests that work becomes meaningful when it overcomes constraining conditions to allow for self-actualization and authenticity. On the other hand, the justification perspective highlights the need for individuals to develop social accounts that legitimize the worthiness of their work. Shellhouse et al. (2019) say that these perspectives are based on classic job design models, which suggest that employee motivation requires three key elements: feeling that the work is important, taking responsibility for the outcomes, and knowing the actual results of their performance.

It is also relevant to mention that it has been discovered that leadership practices, such as environmentally specific servant leadership (ESSL), significantly influence these perceptions by focusing on serving follower needs and fostering pro-environmental principles

(Elshaer et al., 2023). According to this article, ESSL promotes brand citizenship behavior by mediating the relationship through green-crafting behavior and perceived meaningful work. However, other scholars affirm that beyond leadership, work becomes meaningful through diverse mechanisms including self-efficacy, belongingness, and transcendence, which connect the self to broader organizational and spiritual entities (Rosso et al., 2010). And, following this idea, effective leaders can further enhance this significance by articulating one overarching organizational goal and providing measurable concrete objectives (Shellhouse et al., 2019).

Finally, field intervention studies have shown that structured training and reflective goal-setting activities can significantly increase job engagement and personal initiative (Fletcher & Schofield, 2019). As mentioned above high levels of perceived work meaningfulness correlate with greater intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction while inversely predicting absenteeism and turnover intention (Shellhouse et al., 2019; Steger et al., 2012; Martela & Pessi, 2018). However, as Rosso et al. (2010) affirm in their paper, the construction of these meanings remains influenced by social silos and socioeconomic status, which makes it harder for people to see the real worth of their work. Nevertheless, one of the most important things discovered from this variable is what Fletcher & Schofield (2019) say: when personal development is coordinated with organizational purpose, employees can see their job as a part of a bigger mission.

2.4 Innovative work behavior

In the beginning, researchers focused on defining what innovative work behavior actually is. For example, Scott and Bruce (1994) explained that "the concept of innovative behavior is understood as incorporating a wide range of organizational behaviors, from the creation to the implementation of ideas". This was important because it showed that

innovation is not just having a revolutionary and bright idea, it's actually a long process that starts with that idea and ends when that idea is implemented and put into practice. Around the same time, others started looking at how the leader affects this process. It was stated that leaders are "important determinants of innovative work behavior" (Scott & Bruce, 1994; Khan et al., 2012).

By the year 2000, the definition of innovative work behavior became more specific than before. Janssen (2000) described it as "the process of creating, introducing, and implementing new ideas in work, groups or organizations to improve the performance role of the individual, group or organization". He also explained this process in three stages: "idea generation, the stage where individuals recognize problems and identify solutions; then idea promotion...; and idea realization" (Janssen, 2000). This shows that innovative behavior is not only thinking about the idea, but it also involves a social process. It means that for an innovative behavior to be truly innovative, an employee must find the solution to a problem, then communicate the idea to get support, and finally work to make that change in the organization.

In the early 2000s, the way companies competed began to change. In the past, success depended on strict rules and control systems, but Bartlett and Ghoshal (2002) explained that "the source of organizational competitiveness has changed from existing systems and control mechanisms to the management and utilization of strategic human resources." This means that a company's greatest strength is no longer its machines or rules, but the talent and ideas of its people. Because of this, organizations started moving "away from the traditional vertical organization model" to a more horizontal culture that allows for more communication and autonomy (Parker et al. 2001; Ramdhani et al. 2017).

A few years later, research showed that innovation is risky because it involves doing things differently. Because of this risk, employees usually don't "feel safe enough to exhibit

innovative behavior" (Husheger et al., 2009). When leaders create a safe environment, companies can "adopt a future-oriented task design" through the creative actions of their employees (Anderson et al., 2014). This process involves personal growth, as innovation "denotes changes in consciousness or behavior at the individual level".

Maintaining that perspective, in the last few years, the focus has been on the individual, like learning new skills or finding better ways to work (Lee et al., 2021; Li & Hsu, 2016), as well as on the feelings of the workers. "Innovation begins at the organizational level, shifts to the conscious creation of individual members, and affects job performance and behavior changes" (Qian et al., 2019, p. 2). Innovation is seen as "a form of voluntary social action that is closely related to the sense of joy and accomplishment" (Kuncoro & Suriani, 2018; Sameer, 2018).

The most recent research from 2024 explains that the connection between the leader and the employee is essential. The reason people innovate is that they feel their work has meaning. As the latest studies show, "work meaningfulness has positive and significant mediating effect in the role of servant leaders to innovation behavior of public servants" (Feoh, 2024). This means that if a leader serves their team, the team finds meaning in their job, and that is what finally leads to innovation.

2.5 Hypothesis development

1. Servant leadership (SL) and innovative work behavior (IWB):

As Ekmekcioglu & Öner, (2024) mention, servant leadership (SL) fosters innovative work behavior (IWB) by prioritizing the development, well-being, and empowerment of followers over a leader's personal interests, which creates a foundation of trust and psychological safety. Similarly to the relationship with IOC, both de Jong & Den Hartog, (2007) and Yoshida et al., (2014) manifest this supportive environment

encourages employees to take risks and experiment with “novel ideas”, as they feel accepted and respected by their leaders.

Furthermore, it has been studied that SL leadership style increases IWB through mediating mechanisms like psychological empowerment and perceived organizational support (Faraz et al., 2019), which provide employees with the necessary autonomy, sense of meaning, and confidence to generate and realize new ideas (Ekmekcioglu & Öner, 2024). Ultimately, by leading example and building strong relationships, servant leaders inspire their teams to adopt the company's goals as their own. And is this connection that motivates employees to focus their energy on finding creative and practical solutions to workplace challenges (de Jong & Den Hartog, 2007).

The following hypothesis is developed with this theoretical context,

H1. Servant leadership (SL) has a positive and significant impact on innovative work behavior (IWB).

2. Work meaningfulness (WM) and innovative work behavior (IWB)

These two variables have been studied together in several researches and has been demonstrated that WM drives IWB. According to the conservation of resources (COR) theory exposed by Sun et al. (2024), meaningful work acts as a psychological resource that helps employees in an organization handle with uncertainties while maintaining motivation for what they do. And in their empirical research they found that WM significantly predicted innovative behavior: “We found that employees’ perceived social impact and task variety were positively associated with work meaningfulness, which in turn significantly predicted innovative behavior.” (Sun et al., 2024, p.632)

Other studies expose similar findings. Deb Biswas & Sengupta (2025) found out that WM was a mediator between managerial humility and IWB which means that a humble

leader (which is also related with SL) fosters a sense of meaning in people's work and this at the same time, promotes IWB. Additionally, Feoh (2024) who was earlier introduced, demonstrated that work meaningfulness (WM) had a mediating and positive effect between servant leadership (SL) and innovative work behavior (IWB), this finding means that servant leaders foster innovation precisely because they manage that followers feel their work is valued.

This literature review led to the following hypothesis,

H2. Work meaningfulness (WM) has a positive and significant impact on innovative work behavior (IWB).

3. Innovative organizational culture (IOC) and innovative work behavior (IWB)

Research has consistently demonstrated that there is a strong relationship between IOC and IWB, after all they both have the word “innovative” in their names. However, is important to remember that while the first one speaks of the environment that fosters innovation, the second one is about the individual's act of innovating and how it applies new methods or techniques at work. In Ekmekcioglu and Öner (2023) research they acknowledged that SL, and IOC are significantly and positively related to employees' IWB. And at the same time SL and IOC stimulate employees' IWB through perceived organizational support POS. This means once again, that in a culture or environment in which people are allowed to make mistakes and experiment, innovation is more likely to happen.

And other study written by Xu et al. (2023) was able to explain the mediating role of IOC to foster IWB. In this empirical research was explained that human resource management (HRM) practices were perceived as useful to promote a culture of innovation inside a company. And this, at the same time helped employees to be more comfortable at suggesting new ideas or ways to do things. From this document was also interesting the fact

that not every HRM activity was helpful to develop innovation, therefore, it is still important to discover which specific psychological items make a population be less or more innovative.

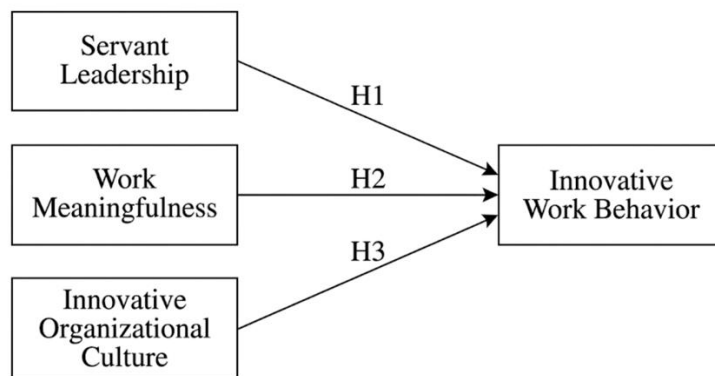
The following hypothesis is developed with this theoretical context,

H3. Innovative organizational culture (IOC) has a positive and significant impact on innovative work behavior (IWB).

Figure 1 depicts the proposed hypothesized model of this study.

Figure 1

Hypothesized model



Source: Figure made by authors

3. Methodology

3.1 Samples and procedures

We collected the data from a diverse group of employees working in organizations across Colombia, primarily located in the country's principal cities (Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Barranquilla). Unlike studies that are restricted to one industry, this research adopted a multi-sectoral approach, having participants from the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors, ranging from newly established local startups to large multinational corporations operating within the country. Studying a broad and heterogeneous population is highly relevant in a developing economy like Colombia, where organizational dynamics and innovative

capabilities vary significantly across industries. And, to successfully understand how leadership styles and internal cultures affected innovation in employee's behavior it was important to have this type of sample for the study.

To gather the data, we identified and contacted potential participants through e-mail, social media networks, and direct in-person outreach, employing a non-probability convenience sampling technique. The respondents completed a google forms online questionnaire between february and may of 2026. Then instrument compiled 52 questions that were divided like this: 19 sociodemographic items, 6 SL items, 10 WM items, 8 IOC items and 9 dedicated to IWB. At the beginning of the questionnaire, it was very clear that responding was voluntary, and that all the responses were going to be used for academic purposes for which the questionnaire was also anonymous.

A total of 200 people completed the instrument. The sample showed balance regarding the sex distribution with 48,5% being male and 51,5% being female. On the other side the age distribution was the following: 48,5% were between 18 and 29, 18% were between 30 and 39, 11% were between 40 and 49, 17,5% were between 50 and 59 and the last 5% were 60 or older. Finally, the participants demonstrated a solid level of organizational stability, with a mean tenure of 5 years being part of their respective current companies.

3.2 Measures

Although all the measures were originally developed in English, they were translated into Spanish adopting a translation-backward translation approach (Brislin, 1980). The variable of servant leadership (SL) and the variable work meaningfulness (WM) were rated based on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). On the other hand, innovative organizational culture (IOC) was rated based on a four-point Likert scale (1=does not describe my organization to 4=describe my organization most of the time). And

the dependent variable, innovative work behavior (IWB) was rated based on a 7-point Likert scale (1=never to 7=always).

Servant leadership. SL was measured by Sendjaya et al. (2019) six-item scale: SLBS-6 (Servant Leadership Behavior Scale, 6-item short form) which is an efficient version of Servant Leadership Behavior Scale (SLBS) that Sendjaya and his colleagues originally developed in 2008 (Sendjaya et al., 2008). Each of the questions asked respond to a specific dimension of SL such as: voluntary subordination, authentic self, covenantal relationship, responsible morality, transcendental spirituality and transforming influence. One sample item is: “My leader uses power in service to others, not for his or her ambition.”

Innovative organizational culture. IOC was measured utilizing the scale developed by Ellen Wallach (1983) called the Organizational Culture Index. Although the full OCI contains 24 adjectives divided into three cultural dimensions (bureaucratic, innovative, and supportive), we decided to isolate the 8 items directly aligned with our hypotheses (describing environments that are dynamic, exciting, and full of challenges). One sample item is: “My organization can be described as Stimulating: An environment that provides mental or creative arousal.”

Work meaningfulness. WM was validated through the scale developed by Steger et al. (2012) called the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI). Three sub-dimensions were analyzed in these items: positive meaning, meaning making through work and greater good motivation. One sample item is “I have found a meaningful career”.

Innovative work behavior. IWB was validated using the scale of Janssen (2000) which presents 9 items as some behavioral statements. These items analyze certain sub-dimensions of IWB such as: idea generation, idea promotion and idea realization. One sample item is “In your current job, how often do you create new ideas for difficult issues?”

4. Results

4.1 Reliability analysis

The first analysis performed concerned the reliability of the scales used in the study. A total of four scales were used: Servant Leadership (SL), Work Meaningfulness (WM), Innovative Organizational Culture (IOC), and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB). The objective of calculating reliability was to verify that the scale used was trustworthy. For this purpose, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. A value above 0.9 is considered a good result.

The results showed that the Servant Leadership scale (α : 0.945), with a mean of 3.847 and a standard deviation of 1.126, indicates a positive perception of servant leadership and moderate variability in responses.

For its part, the Innovative Organizational Culture scale presented an Alpha coefficient of $\alpha=0.838$, considered adequate in terms of reliability, with a mean of 3.038 and a standard deviation of 0.673, reflecting a moderate perception of innovative organizational culture.

On the side of the Work Meaningfulness scale presented an Alpha coefficient of $\alpha=0.927$, considered a good result, with a mean of 3.917 and a standard deviation of 0.799, showing a consistently high perception of purpose and significance among the surveyed employees, with relatively low variance in their responses.

Finally, the Innovative Work Behavior scale obtained an excellent level of internal consistency (α : 0.978), with a mean of 5.104 and a standard deviation of 1.452, indicating high levels of innovative behavior and greater dispersion in the responses. Overall, the results show that all the scales used present satisfactory levels of reliability and internal consistency, allowing their use in subsequent analyses.

4.2 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Subsequently, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed to evaluate the degree of association between the study variables. This analysis allows for the identification of the influence between the variables, as well as the direction and intent of these associations. This study ranges from 0 to 1; the closer to 1, the stronger the correlation. The corresponding correlations will be presented later in Table 1.

The results showed positive and statistically significant correlations between all the variables analyzed ($p < .001$). In particular, servant leadership showed a positive correlation with Work Meaningfulness ($r = 0.598, p < .001$), Innovative Work ($r = 0.455, p < .001$), and Innovative Organizational Culture ($r = 0.408, p < .001$). These results suggest that higher levels of servant leadership mean there is a greater perception of meaning in work, a more innovation-oriented organizational culture, and higher levels of innovative behavior.

Likewise, work meaningfulness showed a positive and significant influence with Innovative Work Behavior ($r = 0.502, p < .001$) and with Innovative Organizational Culture ($r = 0.369, p < .001$). Finally, a positive correlation was found between Innovative Organizational Culture and Innovative Work Behavior ($r = 0.554, p < .001$), indicating that organizational contexts oriented towards innovation tend to foster innovative behaviors in employees.

Overall, the correlation results support the theoretically proposed relationships between the variables and demonstrate the positive associations between servant leadership, work meaning, innovative organizational culture, and innovative work behavior.

4.3 Regression analysis

Later, in order to analyze the explanatory power of the independent variables on innovative work behavior (IWB), different linear regression models were performed. In all

cases, IWB was the dependent variable of the model. The M_0 model included only the Servant Leadership (SL) variable. The results showed that the model was statistically significant ($F = 51.63$, $p < .001$) and explained 20.7% of the variance in innovative work behavior ($R^2 = 0.207$).

Subsequently, the M_1 model additionally incorporated the Work Meaningfulness (WM) variable. The inclusion of this variable increased the model's explanatory power, reaching 28.9% of the explained variance ($R^2 = 0.289$). Furthermore, the model also showed statistical significance ($F = 40.10$, $p < .001$).

Finally, the M_2 model jointly included Servant Leadership (SL), Work Meaningfulness (WM), and Innovative Organizational Culture (IOC). This model showed the highest explanatory power, reaching 41.9% of the variance explained in Innovative Behavior ($R^2 = 0.419$). Furthermore, the model was statistically significant ($F = 47.07$, $p < .001$).

As illustrated later in Table 2, the empirical results confirm the structural and psychological pathways linking servant leadership to employee innovation. The diagram integrates both the direct bivariate associations, and the incremental explanatory power (R^2) obtained through successive linear regression models (M_0 , M_1 , and M_2).

Table 1

Pearson's correlation

Pearson's Correlations

			n	Pearson's r	p
SL	-	WM	200	0.598	< .001
SL	-	IWB	200	0.455	< .001
SL	-	IOC	200	0.408	< .001
WM	-	IWB	200	0.502	< .001
WM	-	IOC	200	0.369	< .001
IWB	-	IOC	200	0.554	< .001

Note. All tests one-tailed, for positive correlation.

Source: table made with JASP (Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program) free and open-source statistical analysis software.

Table 2*Regression equations**Regression Equations*

Model	Equation
M ₀	IWB = 2.849 + 0.586 SL
M ₁	IWB = 1.362 + 0.31 SL + 0.651 WM
M ₂	IWB = -0.127 + 0.16 SL + 0.509 WM + 0.863 IOC

Source: table made with JASP (Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program) free and open-source statistical analysis software.

5. Discussion

The results of this study provide evidence about the positive influence between servant leadership, work meaningfulness, innovative organizational culture, and innovative work behavior in Colombian organizations. The findings support the hypotheses proposed in this research and are consistent with the previous literature review about these variables.

In general, the results showed positive and significant relationships between all variables. Employees who perceived higher levels of servant leadership, work meaningfulness, and innovative organizational culture also reported higher levels of innovative work behavior. These findings suggest that innovative work behavior is influenced not only by individual creativity, but also by leadership styles, meaningful work experiences, and organizational environments that support change and new ideas.

H1: The SL theory will positively affect IWB in the organization.

It was found out that there is a positive relationship between servant leadership and IWB ($r = 0.455$, $p < .001$). This finding proves our first hypothesis and supports the ideas proposed by Scott and Bruce (1994) and Janssen (2000) when they said that IWB includes the creation, promotion, and implementation of innovations within an organization. Our

findings prove the theory of Greenleaf (1977) because he believed that servant leaders pay attention to developing and supporting their subordinates instead of pursuing organization goals. Leaders that have empathy and sincerely care about the welfare of their employees will provide environments wherein they can easily express their ideas.

Innovation is normally associated with uncertainty and risk, hence making workers fear criticism and failures. According to Husheger et al. (2009), workers normally do not feel psychologically safe enough to exhibit innovative behaviors. In this study, it was shown that servant leadership had a positive impact on innovative work behavior. This implies that a positive approach of leadership could enhance worker confidence when coming up with solutions. Servant leadership accounted for 20.7 percent of variance in innovative work behavior ($R^2 = 0.207$).

H2: Work meaningfulness (MW) positively influences innovative work behaviors (IWB).

According to the findings, there was a positive and significant influence between meaningful work and innovative work behavior ($r = 0.502$, $p < .001$). This validates the second hypothesis indicating that meaningful work is positively associated with innovative behaviors. The findings are consistent with the definition by Steger et al. (2012) according to whom meaningful work reflects perceptions of employees regarding the significance of their work.

These findings support the idea of Feoh (2024) who stated that innovative behaviors are encouraged among those employees who share an emotional connection with their work. This means that meaningful work might be positively correlated with innovation within the organization. From the regression analysis, it can be observed that after adding work meaningfulness to the second model, there is an increase in R^2 value from 0.207 to 0.289. It indicates that innovative work behavior is not only impacted by the motivation but also the work experience of employees.

H3: Innovative Organizational Culture (IOC) positively influences Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)

The positive and significant impact between IOC and IWB has been verified with $r = 0.554$, $p < .001$. It proves the third hypothesis and shows that employees have higher chances to exhibit innovative behavior within an organizational environment, which promotes creativity, learning, and open attitude towards changes. The results correspond to Schein's (1990) theory that employee behavior depends on values and beliefs promoted within an organizational culture.

Moreover, the results are compatible with ideas expressed by Denison & Mishra (1995) who stated that organizations have better chances for development within an adaptable culture. One of the strongest correlations has been observed between IOC and IWB variables. The regression analysis has also shown this relationship. In the final model, which consisted of IOC, servant leadership and work meaningfulness, the level of explanation rose to $R^2 = 0.419$. It means that in combination, these factors explain the variance in IWB variables by 41.9%, making an impact on the phenomenon of innovation clear.

5.1 Contributions to organizational management

Several contributions are made to organizational management from the research. Firstly, it has provided empirical support on the positive relationship between servant leadership and meaningful work, innovative organizational culture, and innovative work behaviors in Colombian organizations. This implies that organizations are likely to improve employee well-being as well as their performance through servant leadership that emphasizes employee development and support.

Secondly, the research demonstrates the significance of work meaningfulness as an organizational resource. When employees have a sense that their work has a meaning, they

become more motivated, engaged, and innovative. This can be achieved by recognizing employee contributions, communicating organizational objectives, and offering growing opportunities. Finally, this study contributes to the literature on servant leadership in Latin America. Because much of the previous research on servant leadership and innovation has been developed in North American or European contexts. This study helps expand the understanding of these variables in Colombian organizations

5.2 Limitations of the study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. One important limitation is the low reliability result for the Innovative Organizational Culture scale. This may indicate that some items were not interpreted consistently by participants, possibly because of cultural differences related to the understanding of some innovation concepts.

Another limitation is the cross-sectional design of the study, since all variables were measured at a single moment in time. Because of this, the study can identify relationships between the variables, but it cannot confirm with certainty whether servant leadership directly causes higher work meaningfulness, innovative organizational culture, or innovative work behavior. The study also relied on self-report measures, since participants evaluated their own perceptions and behaviors. The study also relied on self-report measures, which could increase the possibility of result bias.

5.3 Future research

Future studies could continue exploring these relationships using longitudinal designs to better understand how servant leadership influences work meaningfulness, organizational culture, and innovative work behavior over time.

Finally, future studies could explore whether specific variables such as industry, the size of organizations, or contract type influence the relationship between servant leadership and innovation. Also, cross-cultural research in other Latin American nations could be of great use as well for expanding knowledge about these variables in another setting. In conclusion, the present paper contributes to the understanding of the role of servant leadership for improving employee wellbeing, organization's culture and innovations. So, those companies that are focused on employee development will succeed.

6. Conclusion and implications

In conclusion the study was able to demonstrate that in order to promote innovation in companies there needs to be a change in the way leadership is happening. There needs to be a focus in empathy and understanding of the employees and followers so the organization can success. The document was also able to validate the statistical relationship between servant leadership (SL), work meaningfulness (WM), innovative organizational culture (IOC) and innovative work behavior (IWB).

The analysis of the regression was really clear in the sense that although SL influences on IWB, the impact becomes bigger when WM and IOC are added, which means that is not only a matter of having a good leader that is focused on its follower's wellbeing, but also an environment that promotes innovation and ignores the fear of failure, as well as gives meaning to workers daily jobs.

Finally, as seen before the limitations in the study open the opportunity for new literature to satisfy the gaps that are left. As the information was collected at one point of time and there were only 200 respondents future research should focus on a larger sample and maybe gather the data for longer time to understand how the impact of SL, WM, and IOC over IWB evolves over time. Also, since this sample integrated professionals from a highly

diverse multi-sectoral backgrounds, new investigations on these subjects would greatly benefit from analyzing whether these mediation paths vary significantly when the size of the company varies, the sector that is strictly analyzed and if companies inside Colombia are compared with international ones. However, in an overall basis, this project establishes a robust baseline proving that companies that prioritize human growth and supportive work environments are better equipped to achieve long-term innovation and organizational success.

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